

Weekly Sunday Readings Reflections

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The 33rd Sunday of Ordinary Time – Nov 16, 2025

"By your endurance you will gain your lives"

Question of the Week: What are your expectations of your future?

- **First Reading: Malachi 3: 19-20a**

But for you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays.

- **Responsorial: Psalm 145: 1-2, 8-11, 13,14**

R: The Lord comes to rule the earth with justice.

- **Second Reading: 2 Thessalonians 3: 7-12**

... we wanted to present ourselves as a model for you ...

- **Gospel: Luke 21: 5-19**

the days will come when there will not be left a stone upon another stone that will not be thrown down

Reading 1: The Coming Wrath

Q: Have you ever called out to God for the bad times to end? What happened?

When will evil be taken from our eyes? When will our enemies taste justice? These questions are as old as humanity, yet as new as today's reports. This vexing can be summed up in one question. Lord, when will you come?

The prophet Malachi proclaimed his oracles when the world was undergoing change. In the fifth century B.C., the Persian Empire returned the Jews to their homeland from exile in Babylon. Yet, these benevolent rulers faced the rising menace from the Greeks to the west. At home, the excitement of the return had worn thin. Jewish leadership

(especially in the Temple) had returned to its corrupt ways. The poor suffered at the hands of the rich. Lost in the stress of political instability and religious corruption was faith. In the face of this turmoil, God was forgotten.

The prophet wrote a simple message. God would return. In the coming day of judgment, the Lord would consume the evil like a flash fire of intense heat. But that same fire would soothe the faithful. [19-20a]

God's judgment is a two-edged sword. It condemns yet vindicates. His judgment will come, despite the seeming delay. But rest assured. It will come.

Q: How do you look forward to the coming of the Lord?

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Responsorial: Contagious Praise

Q: How have you encouraged others to pray?

One of the easiest ways to evangelize others is to tell them you will pray for them (of course, be sincere and follow through). If you're bold, ask the person you're trying to evangelize to pray for you. If they agree, you've been successful, for prayer is an exercise of faith.

Prayer can be contagious. I pray for you and you pray for me. It creates a bond between people and commits people to God. But petition prayer is only the first step. The next step in the faith commitment is praise, acknowledging God as the Lord. When we encourage others to praise God in Christ, then we are truly evangelizing them. Praise leads to exhortation which leads to praise.

Psalm 98 was a perfect example of mixing praise with exhortation. As the singer praised God in a liturgical setting, he urged others to praise the Lord. The chant leader became "God's cheerleader," the person who inspired community spirit to worship God.

The psalm can be divided into three sections with a very loose "A-B-A" structure. 98:1b-4 set the tone with an imperative to "Sing a new song" for God's power and deeds. Victory, remembrance of the covenant, and universal reputation were the results of God's activity among his people. 98:7-9 commanded nature itself to give praise for God's control over the cosmos and his justice. The common thread between the beginning and end was the order to praise God (98:1b, 7-8); the difference was the audience (the nations in 98:2, 3b vs. nature in 98:7-9).

The "A-B-A" structure emphasized the center ("B" element). The core of the psalm was the exhortation to praise. Notice if the phrase "all the earth" was deleted, 98:4-6 would stand as liturgical direction to the Temple musicians to praise God in song (direction to harp, trumpet, and horn). By including the phrase "all the earth," the author included the universe in the call to Temple worship. In this way, communal praise had a cosmic dimension.

Prayer can be contagious. Praise can be contagious. Join us in praise to God. Encourage others to that praise. Call everyone and everything to shout joyous song to our Maker. Praise God in Christ!

Invite one person to pray with you this week. In your prayer, praise God for his goodness and love.

Reading 2: The Limits of Charity

Q: How do you give to others in need?

3:7 "For you know how it was necessary to imitate us" The Greek word for "imitate" is "mimic."

3:8 "we did not eat meals as a gift from some" The word "meals" is actually "bread."

What do Christians do with "freeloaders?"
What are the limits of Christian charity?

Unfortunately, there are some Christians who disrupt the tranquility of life with idle gossip and speculation, with unreasonable requests, or with duplicity. Some just do the bare minimum to get by, and depend on others to pick up the slack. Others don't even pretend to work; these lazy leeches use people to fulfill their needs through guilt trips, whining,

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and manipulation. I'll bet most of you have met people like these in life and at church.

Human nature hasn't changed in the last two millennia. The author (Paul?) addressed the problem of laziness in two ways. First, he gave himself as an example. He could have leaned on the hospitality of the community, even ordering help from groups. But, instead, he chose to work and be financially independent, so he wouldn't be a hardship on his hosts and he could claim the high moral ground.

Second, he dealt with the freeloaders in a straightforward fashion. Work or don't eat. Notice these instructions were to the community, not individuals. Early Christian communities were known for "agape" meals (a forerunner to "potluck" dinners) that were open to the poor and needy. Later, offerings were taken for the poor at worship; this sharing was distributed by deacons according to need. While these practices might not have been addressed directly in 2 Thessalonians, the author did address the limits of Christian charity. Charity was meant to help those in need, not the lazy in want. Those who can work should, those who cannot work should receive help.

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between those in need and those in want. Obviously, decisions when and where to give charity require wisdom. Let us pray for this virtue when we place limits on Christian charity.

Q: Do you pray for wisdom when you contribute your time, energy, and money in charitable work? How has that prayer helped you?

Gospel: Appearance Over Content?

*Q: How important are appearances to other?
How important are appearances to you?*

In the 1960's, a critic of popular culture proclaimed, "The medium is the message." In many ways, his prediction has come true. Many television outlets emphasize style over content. Media marketing reveals the masses prefer to watch attractive people who report the news with flashy computer graphics. Appearances are as important as content. In some cases, appearances confuse content. (When was the last time you saw a local news program blow a small issue out of proportion?)

Why are we fooled by appearances? Why are we lulled into complacency by the calm before the storm? (Remember September 10th?) Why are we tempted to give up when the world finally comes crashing down around our ears? Focused upon the end of the world, Jesus addressed these questions in Luke's gospel.

When people commented on the glory of the Temple, Jesus prophesied doom to shake them from their spiritual slumber. Then he assured his followers of divine help in the time of trial.

21:5 ". . . Temple that it was adorned with beautiful stones and votive offerings." The "beautiful" stones are the fine stone out of which the building was built. The "votive offerings" are decoration placed on the Temple. The disciples were awed with the Temple itself, not additions made to the building.

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21:12 The main verbs of this sentence ("they will get their hands on you (i.e., arrest you)" and "persecute you") has two results: 1) turn over people to synagogues and public prisons and 2) put them on trial before kings and Roman officials. This verse leads up to 21:13, the opportunity to witness.

21:16 "(The authorities) will put you to death." The subject of the sentence is actually "they" which could refer to the trial authorities in 21:12b or to the family-friends in 21:16a. One or the other (or both!) could put the believers to death. In some cultures at the time, a patriarch had the power of life and death (especially over family members who disgraced the family).

21:18-19 The proverb in 21:18 seemed to contradict 21:16b; some would be martyred for the faith. The verse can be taken spiritually (the martyrs will enjoy heaven). Or, the verse can refer to the survival of the community itself. 21:19 echoed the sense of 21:18. It can refer to the afterlife of the individual or the survival of the community.

Throughout time, people have taken spiritual comfort in sacred times, sacred places, and sacred events. In the time of Jesus, the Temple was THE spiritual center for Jews. It was the only place of sacrificial worship for a people that lived throughout the known world. Its priestly institution had a central place in the Torah, the Jewish Law. The Temple represented the core of Judaism that had lasted for centuries.

However, many people have confused sacred times, places, and events with a relationship with God himself. They define faith by these times, places, and events. To many Jews traveling with Jesus, the lavishly rebuilt and

adorned Temple was a sure sign God was with his people. But, as Jesus pointed out, appearances were deceiving. [21:5-6] "What is here today," Jesus seemed to say, "won't be here tomorrow." With the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 A.D., the prophecy of Jesus came true.

With his comment, the ears of Jesus' followers perked up. For centuries, Jews had awaited the coming of Judgment Day, when God would save his people and his wrath would fall on those who persecuted Israel. Prophets great and small had included a corrupt Temple priesthood with those who oppressed the people. With the fall of the Temple, God's kingdom would finally come. Now Jesus maybe would speak on the end. "Is this the end?" they seemed to say. Then, his followers asked him for details. "What sign would precede the end?" [21:7]

Jesus began with the last question first. The sign his followers sought might be a cosmic or world-changing political event. Or, it could be a person. Many have preached in the name of Jesus ("come in my name") only to line their own pockets with contributions or to flatter their own egos. Many charismatic leaders have been proclaimed "the Christ" ("I am he" or "The time is right.") only to fall. [21:8a] (A second great Jewish revolt against Rome in 130's A.D. was led by a charismatic leader proclaimed the Messiah by the chief priest in a liberated Jerusalem. In the end, the Romans recaptured the city and killed the leader in a desert cave that overlooked the Dead Sea.)

As many people have sought comfort in religious institutions, others have sought comfort in the prophets that doom the

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institutions. Those zealous for the doom prophets did not heed the wisdom of Jesus to watch and wait. In the face of righteous mob or the burning issue, Jesus taught patience. [21:8b]

Prophets of doom point to historical calamities (wars and revolts) and cosmic disasters (great earthquakes, famines, pestilence and "signs in heaven" like solar eclipses and comets) as signs of the end. Jesus taught that wars and revolts would at first shake the great "Pax Romana" (the forced peace in the Roman Empire) and undermine social order; but this would not be the end. [21:9] Upset in the social order would be followed by cosmic disaster. [21:10-11]

But before the signs marking the end (indeed, as a sign that marked the end), Christians would be persecuted in general (i.e., throughout the known world). For their belief in Jesus' name, Christians would be arrested and tried in court. This test of faith was also an opportunity to witness to the court officials and to the public at large. A general persecution would be a massive evangelization campaign. [21:12-13]

How do Christians prepare for coming problems? They don't, according to Jesus. The Lord himself will provide the eloquence and the wisdom in speech that cannot be contradicted or overcome. [21:14-15] The only response one can make to coming troubles is trust in the Lord.

Christian faith divided families and friends as well as nations. Indeed, if the verses were read backwards, the first sign of the Lord's coming would be the stress in families and social circles, then within nations, and finally in the natural order. But, Jesus began from the

universal to the personal to make a point; even personal distress was a sign of the Kingdom. Such personal persecution could even lead to death at the hands of family and friends. Such was the hatred of the Christian faith; such was the power of Christian witness. [21:16-17] This thought leads to a distressing insight. If we do not have some problems in our lives because of our Christian faith, are we effectively witnessing to others?

The costs were high but the faith would continue. Not only would the individual martyr see the Lord in heaven, but the Church would flourish in persecution. [21:18-19] Persecution was a key reason the Church grew at a tremendous rate. People desired the calm trust of the Christian, the great love of the follower even in the face of death.

Catechism Theme: The Second Coming

675 Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers. The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth will unveil the "mystery of iniquity" in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh.

The second trial before the end of time is like the sin of Adam. People try to play God; they put their trust in others rather than their creator. As the Church teaches, we should beware of the easy solution, the charismatic leader who has the answers, or the means to

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manipulate that we cannot control. There are no short cuts to salvation. Our opposition to the easy way, our witness to the power of God, will lead to persecution. But our trust in God will engender faith in others.

*Create a space and time for peace this week.
Seek God's love and peace in prayer.*

Q: Have you ever been impressed by the unwavering Christian witness in another? Who was it? Why were you impressed? Did he or she face hardship? How did they endure the hardship?

How impressed are we with appearances? After all, media, Hollywood, and much of computer software are built on appearance. Sometimes, we Americans are swayed and even hood-winked by appearances. There was calm before the storm. Then, there was a panic with a world that failed us. Are we lulled by calm? Are we surprised by panic?

The challenge Jesus put before us is clear vision. Can we see beyond the crises of life and nation? Can our faith help us to withstand the challenges of these uncertain times? With God's help, we can.

Pray this week for the strength to see clearly. Look at the world at large, or at your world. Try to see beyond the troubles and look for God's will. Trust your prayer will be answered.

gifts require eternal responses.

John's gospel also inferred another insight about peace and love. Both qualities do not exist in a vacuum, or stand on their own. Simply chanting the words did not (and do not) make them happen. Both required a relationship, a dependance upon another. To experience the peace and love of God, we must depend upon God. Totally. Completely.